

Claims

- 1 59 61 > 1. A method comprising  
 2 enabling a holder of a financial account to predefine a virtual  
 3 account associated with the financial account, the virtual account having  
 4 an associated limitation on a payment to be made from the financial  
 5 account,  
 6 in connection with a transaction, providing information about the  
 7 virtual account to a third party, and  
 8 in response to a request made by the third party for payment using  
 9 the virtual account information, preventing any payment from the financial  
 10 account that is outside of the limitation associated with the virtual account.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1 in which the limitation of the virtual  
 2 account comprises a restriction on the identity of the third party to whom  
 3 the payment is made.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1 in which the limitation of the virtual  
 2 account comprises a restriction on the amount of the payment that may be  
 3 made.
- 1 4. The method of claim 1 in which the limitation of the virtual  
 2 account comprises an expiration date.
- 1 5. The method of claim 1 in which the limitation of the virtual  
 2 account comprises a restriction on the number of times payments can be  
 3 made.
- 1 6. The method of claim 1 in which the information about the  
 2 virtual account includes a virtual account identifier.
- 1 7. The method of claim 1 in which the financial account  
 2 comprises a credit card.
- 1 8. The method of claim 1 in which the financial account and  
 2 the virtual account are maintained by different entities.
- 1 9. The method of claim 1 in which there are multiple financial  
 2 accounts and the virtual account has associated limitations on the  
 3 payments to be made from each of the financial accounts.

1           10.    The method of claim 7 in which there are multiple third  
2 parties and the virtual account has associated limitations on the payments  
3 to be made to each of the third parties.

1           11.    The method of claim 6 further comprising  
2 enabling the holder to present the virtual account identifier to the  
3 third party electronically.

1           12.    The method of claim 6 in which the virtual account  
2 identifier comprises between one and sixteen letters or numbers.

1           13.    The method of claim 1 in which there are multiple virtual  
2 accounts.

1           14.    The method of claim 13 in which two of the virtual  
2 accounts are associated with one of the financial accounts.

1           15.    The method of claim 1 further comprising  
2 enabling the holder to predefine the virtual account using an  
3 electronic user interface.

1           16.    The method of claim 1 further comprising  
2 enabling the holder to add, delete, and modify the virtual account.

1           17.    The method of claim 1 in which the virtual account has an  
2 associated password and the holder is prevented from viewing, deleting, or  
3 modifying the virtual account except upon presentation of the password.

1           18.    The method of claim 1 in which  
2 the request for payment is made in connection with a purchase by  
3 the holder from the third party, the request for payment is made to an  
4 intermediary party that maintains the virtual account on behalf of the  
5 holder, and the intermediary verifies the availability of the payment from  
6 the from financial account before authorizing the payment request.

1           19.    The method of claim 1 in which  
2 the holder has access to the virtual account through a web browser.

1           20.    The method of claim 19 in which  
2 the holder has access through an icon displayed on a tool bar of a  
3 web browser.

1           21.    The method of claim 1 in which  
2           the holder has access to the virtual account through a web site of  
3           an intermediary party.

1           22.    The method of claim 1 in which  
2           the holder has access to the virtual account through a telephone.

1           23.    A method comprising  
2           enabling a holder of a financial account to set two different  
3           arbitrary predefined limits on payments that are permissible to make from  
4           the financial account, each of the limits being associated with a context in  
5           which a transaction may occur, and  
6           blocking a payment from the financial account that would violate  
7           either of the different arbitrary predefined limits, depending on the context  
8           of the transaction in which the payment is to be made.

1           24.    The method of claim 23 in which the payment is blocked  
2           by an intermediary other than a financial institution that maintains the  
3           financial account.

1           25.    The method of claim 23 in which the holder can set the  
2           predefined limits using a telephone.

1           26.    The method of claim 1 in which the predefining includes  
2           the holder presenting a virtual account identifier for the virtual account.

1           27.    The method of claim 1 in which the predefining includes  
2           the holder receiving a virtual account identifier for the virtual account.

1           28.    A method comprising  
2           maintaining a digitally stored user file for an individual who holds  
3           financial accounts, the user file identifying virtual accounts that set limits  
4           on permissible payments to be made from the financial account to  
5           specified receivers of the payments, and  
6           processing requests by possible receivers of payments from the  
7           financial accounts by blocking requests that violate the limits.

1           29.    A storage medium bearing a program capable of  
2           configuring a machine to

enable a holder of a financial account to predefine a virtual account associated with the financial account, the virtual account having an associated limitation on a payment to be made from the financial account, in connection with a transaction, provide information about the virtual account to a third party, and in response to a request made by the third party for payment using the virtual account information, prevent any payment from the financial account that is outside of the limitation associated with the virtual account.

30. A database of digitally stored information capable of enabling a machine to

identify virtual account information associated with a financial account, and

in response to a request made by a third party for payment using the virtual account information, identify limitations on payments from the financial account that are associated with the virtual account information.

~~31. A website that enables a user of a browser to register as a user of financial account management services, and manage virtual accounts associated with financial accounts, the virtual accounts defining limitations on payments that can be made from the financial accounts.~~

32. A method comprising a first party giving to a second party a file identifier identifying the first party's file with an intermediary party and a virtual account identifier identifying a virtual account maintained by the intermediary party on behalf of the first party, and

blocking the second party from obtaining payment of funds from a financial account of the first party if the payment would violate limits defined in the virtual account.

~~33. A method comprising enabling a holder of a financial account to get access to a virtual account management system using a telephone, and~~

4 after access is obtained, permitting the holder to manage a virtual  
5 account associated with the financial account using the telephone.

1 34. The method of claim 33 in which the virtual account has an  
2 associated password and the holder is prevented from managing the virtual  
3 account except on presentation of the password.

1 35. The method of claim 33 in which managing the virtual  
2 account includes managing limits on the virtual account.

1 36. The method of claim 35 in which managing the virtual  
2 account includes managing limits on multiple virtual accounts associated  
3 with the holder in a single telephone call.

1 37. The method of claim 35 in which the limits include  
2 restrictions on payments that may be made from the virtual account to one  
3 or more third parties.

1 38. The method of claim 35 in which the limits include an  
2 expiration date of the virtual account.

1 39. The method of claim 35 in which the limits include  
2 restrictions on the identities of one or more third parties authorized to  
3 receive payments from the virtual account.

1 40. The method of claim 35 in which the limits include  
2 identities of one or more financial accounts associated with the virtual  
3 account.

1 41. A method comprising  
2 in connection with a proposed financial transaction, determining  
3 whether the transaction conforms to predefined limitations of a virtual  
4 account associated with an active financial account that is a source of  
5 funds for the proposed financial transaction, and  
6 validating the proposed financial transaction only if the limitations  
7 are met.

8

9 42. Apparatus comprising

10 a virtual financial account that is associated with an active  
11 financial account, the active financial account being a source of funds for  
12 financial transactions, the virtual financial account defining limitations on  
13 uses of funds in the active financial account that can be tested against  
14 characteristics of a proposed financial transaction to determine whether or  
15 not to validate the proposed financial transaction.